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SUBJECT: FARDC IN EASTERN DRC OFTEN UNDERMINING SECURITY

REF: KINSHASA 818

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

11. (C) Summary: The Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) constitute one of the more problematic elements of the overall security situation in eastern DRC. Underpaid, underequipped, poorly disciplined, and poorly led, elements of the FARDC continue to harass, extort and menace local populations, thereby contributing to the overall sense of insecurity rather than reducing it. Most problems with Congolese forces largely come from those brigades that have yet to be integrated, although problems exist with some of the FARDC's integrated brigades as well. While some progress has been made in professionalizing the DRC's military, the force as a whole remains incapable of defending the country from internal or external threats, and cannot act independent of substantial support from MONUC peacekeepers. End summary.

12. (C) PolOff and EconOff visited North Kivu province's Grand Nord region and the DRC's northeastern Ituri District May 4-10 to assess the overall security situation as well as the FARDC's role as it relates to the resolution of those problems. In speaking with various local politicians, MONUC officials, Church leaders, and FARDC officers, EmbOffs confirmed the Congolese military in this part of the DRC faces the same logistical challenges as in other areas of the country: irregular (or nonexistent) salaries, a lack of ammunition and transport, and deplorable living conditions. Consequently, certain elements of the FARDC -- particularly among the non-integrated forces -- prey upon local populations, demanding exactions, stealing food, or committing other violations. In return, Congolese citizens in the East tend to consider the FARDC to be a menace equal to (if not greater than) militias or foreign armed groups.

FARDC IN THE GRAND NORD: LOYAL TO WHOM?

13. (C) The 88th and 89th FARDC brigades are currently stationed in North Kivu's Grand Nord region (located along the Beni-Butembo axis). These two brigades, comprising several thousand soldiers, have not gone through the integration process. The commander of MONUC peacekeepers in Beni, Colonel V.S. Rathore, said most of the soldiers in the 88th and 89th brigades are former members of the Congolese People's Army (APC), the former military wing of the Rally for Congolese Democracy-Kisangani/Liberation Movement (RCD-K/ML), led by current Minister of Regional Cooperation (and presidential candidate) Mbusa Nyamwisi.

14. (C) Because of the history and origins of these particular troops, many in the Grand Nord question where their loyalties

lie. Colonel Rathore, as well as the acting head of office for MONUC-Beni, Alfred John, said these troops were believed to be loyal to Nyamwisi rather than the GDRC, especially since most of them fought under Nyamwisi when the APC was operational. Beni civil society representative Elie Danga said he and many others feared that if Nyamwisi and his party lose in the upcoming elections, he would call upon these ex-APC troops to somehow seize control of the local government. Butembo's assistant bishop, Monsignor Emmanuel, said these forces need to be sent through the integration process and replaced with troops who are not from this region, and therefore not as easily susceptible to political manipulation. The overall sense among those in Beni and Butembo is that the FARDC in these areas cannot be trusted to respect election results.

EXACTIONS CREATE TENSIONS

15. (C) The FARDC in the Grand Nord also suffers from problems of its own making. The region is a major import and export center for goods moving to and from Uganda, both legally and illegally. Customs and border officials interviewed by EconOff admitted that some FARDC troops profit from illegal trade in wood, coffee, gold and other items. In addition, these officials said certain elements of the FARDC demand bribes at border crossings to "facilitate" the transport of goods (reftel). While the level of FARDC involvement in these activities is impossible to quantify, local officials throughout the Grand Nord said they were certain the military is involved to some extent. MONUC officials in Butembo reported that some members of the 89th FARDC brigade, in

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addition to other military personnel, were known to be collecting illegal taxes in the area. The mayors of Beni and Butembo, however, downplayed the role of the FARDC in illegal trade and taxation, saying their involvement was minimal and had, in fact, been decreasing recently.

16. (C) In addition to this form of economic harassment, some FARDC soldiers have engaged in episodes of theft and looting. MONUC officials said some troops have stolen voter registration cards from civilians after military operations in certain areas, claiming the holders of such cards possessed them "illegally." Monsignor Emmanuel of Butembo said he has also received reports from his parishioners of FARDC soldiers establishing roadblocks, demanding exactions and stealing food from villages outside the main towns. Emmanuel explained, though, that such actions resulted primarily because the FARDC is neither paid regularly nor given sufficient supplies. As a result, he said, the military tends to take (sometimes forcefully) what it needs from the local population. Overall, though, the conduct of the FARDC in the Grand Nord has tended to be less problematic than in areas further south in the province.

FARDC IN ITURI: PICKING UP WHERE MILITIAS LEFT OFF

17. (C) In northeastern DRC's Ituri District, FARDC forces face similar problems, but are perhaps a bigger source of insecurity than their counterparts in the Grand Nord. Ituri's local militia presence -- numbering in the thousands -- has necessitated the deployment of three integrated brigades and several other FARDC units (totaling nearly 10,000 troops by one estimate, though definite numbers are difficult to find). Currently stationed in the district are the 1st (near Mahagi), 4th (near Mongbwalu) and 6th (near Lake Albert) Integrated Brigades, plus the 2nd battalion of the 8th Integrated Brigade (sent from North Kivu to provide security in and around Bunia) and the 811th battalion (also dispatched from North Kivu), which is engaged in anti-militia operations in Djugu and Irumu territories. Not all integrated brigades

are created equal, however. The 1st, which was trained by the Belgian military, generally has the best performance record in battle and is the most professional of all the units in Ituri, and perhaps of the FARDC itself. The 4th, by contrast, is less well-trained and -disciplined, its ranks having been depleted by a cholera outbreak and mass desertion when the brigade first arrived in Ituri in 2005. This brigade has also been the subject of the majority of accusations by local populations of harassment and other violations. MONUC officials in Bunia said the 6th is also generally ineffective and is viewed as having questionable loyalty, as the brigade's deputy commander is reported to be a relative of militia leader Cobra Matata. The elements of the 8th brigade, as well as the 811th battalion, have only been stationed in Ituri for a few months, but according to MONUC and other officials, have performed well.

¶8. (C) Much as in the Grand Nord, there is widespread belief that some members of the FARDC engage in illegal trade, particularly in the gold mining regions of Mahagi and Djugu territories. The assistant bishop of Mahagi, Monsignor Leonard, said the militias in these areas used to control illegal cross-border routes, exporting gold, wood and other commodities. The Monsignor added, though, that the FARDC later took over these routes after eliminating or removing the militias. The MONUC head of office in Mahagi, Sandra Reis, said some members of the FARDC were also demanding illegal taxes at trading points along Lake Albert. The Bishop of Bunia, Monsignor Dieudonne Uringi, said many FARDC soldiers have set up illegal roadblocks around Bunia and other parts of Ituri to tax merchants and other travelers.

¶9. (C) Some FARDC soldiers, though, have been involved in more serious incidents against the population. MONUC-Bunia reported in late April that elements of the 811th battalion forced civilians to carry their equipment and physically assaulted those who refused to cooperate. Humanitarian workers in Bunia told PolOff that some FARDC troops rob and beat ex-combatants, stealing their identity cards and the stipends they receive from demobilization programs. MONUC officials in Bunia also reported that some members of the FARDC have been accused of numerous cases of rape, torture and looting, particularly after conducting anti-militia operations. Bishop Uringi said some Congolese troops burned down the homes of civilians after engaging militias near Nioka and Fataki. Uringi added that as a result of these

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violations, local populations will flee in advance of military operations more out of fear of the arrival of the FARDC than of the militias or the fighting itself.

FARDC COMMANDERS CLAIM VIOLATIONS ARE "ISOLATED"

¶10. (C) The commander of FARDC troops in Aru, Major Esongolo, claimed he and his troops respect human rights, and that he and his sub-commanders are investigating allegations of smuggling and arms trafficking across the border with Uganda. (Perhaps to emphasize his point, Major Esongolo also brought to his meeting with PolOff the regional military court official, who carried with him a copy of the DRC's military code of justice.)

¶11. (C) The (now-departed) FARDC-Ituri commander General Bob Ngoie said cases of rape, looting, harassment and other violations were "isolated." General Ngoie argued that such stories were part of a "plot" by certain (unnamed) NGOs and political parties to "discredit" the FARDC before elections. General Ngoie also claimed the allegations of rape or harassment brought forward by most women were not credible, since the women bringing such charges often could not provide evidence, and were therefore "lying." General Ngoie admitted there had been some problems with some FARDC soldiers, but asserted those who had committed violations were held

accountable and brought before military justice. Ngoie and others on his command staff argued that it was in any case nearly impossible to monitor the activities of all FARDC troops in the field, especially since many of them are deployed without well-trained commanding officers. General Ngoie himself has been implicated by others in Bunia and elsewhere in Ituri for his involvement in and sanctioning of violations by the FARDC. Ituri District Commissioner Petronille Vaweka has said Ngoie, a nephew of FARDC Chief of Staff General Kisempia, has also been involved in illegal trade for some time. MONUC officials have also expressed their frustration with Ngoie's behavior and lack of commitment to end impunity. The week after PolOff met with him, Ngoie was reassigned to a position in Kisangani after considerable pressure was brought upon FARDC commanders to remove him from Ituri.

POOR CONDITIONS FOR THE AVERAGE SOLDIER

¶12. (C) FARDC troops in the field, however, are largely unsupported by their commanders in Kinshasa. As has been reported, soldiers often receive their salaries late, if at all, and essentials such as food, ammunition, uniforms and housing are in inadequate supply. When PolOff visited Ituri, troops were being paid for the first time in three months. What they are paid, however, cannot meet the needs of the average soldier, who often must support a wife and many children (who tend to live with the soldiers in military camps). A FARDC major with the 8th Integrated Brigade who was in charge of security at the military camp outside Bunia told PolOff he receives only USD 25 a month. (Those of lower rank receive as little as USD 10 per month.) As a result, he claimed his wife (who did not live in the camp) has had to turn to prostitution in order to provide food for their family. (Note: FARDC troops are supposed to receive USD 50 per month, but this payment rarely makes its way to troops in the field. End note.)

¶13. (C) The living conditions of the FARDC soldiers at Camp Opas outside Bunia illustrate the hardships they endure. The camp includes approximately 700 troops from the 8th Integrated Brigade, plus their wives and children, totaling nearly 2,000 people. The majority of soldiers and their families live in crudely constructed huts made of bamboo and mud, covered with a thatched roof. PolOff saw several dozen of these structures along the main road through the camp. Others at Camp Opas live in a former slaughterhouse, which has no electricity or running water. During a tour of this building, PolOff saw dozens of families crammed into the space, with bare mattresses strewn along a floor covered in mud and fetid pools of water. PolOff estimated, based on the number of beds, that nearly 200 people lived inside the building. Nonetheless, FARDC soldiers PolOff spoke to at the camp claimed their morale was high, although they did complain about their salaries, living conditions and the lack of equipment.

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¶14. (C) In some areas, however, the FARDC and the local population have developed a better working relationship in an effort to improve conditions for the military. In Aru, MONUC officials said a local NGO had recently given the FARDC there an undisclosed amount of money to buy tools for planting crops. (Note: Local NGOs in Ituri tend to be local political interests dressed up in NGO clothing. Many are reportedly controlled by local politicians or leaders. End note.) The idea, officials said, was to make the FARDC more self-sufficient and provide them with their own food source so they would not harass and steal from civilians. In addition, PolOff visited the FARDC camp outside Aru and saw several civilians building semi-permanent shelters for the FARDC troops. Aru Administrator Sindani Anyama said he and local FARDC commanders had reached an agreement in April to

provide labor for the construction of these barracks. Major Esongolo said his troops had previously been living in tents which would often flood or be blown over during storms. Esongolo added that the soldiers under his command (approximately 750) were also living with private families and among the population in Aru. (Comment: Illicit trade between Aru and Uganda is extensive, and FARDC soldiers likely profit from it as well. The construction of these new barracks may be nothing more than a marriage of convenience between illegal traders, who want to continue their cross-border commerce with little interference from (or even the assistance of) the military, and the local FARDC, which wants a cut of the action. The cooperation seen in Aru, while encouraging on the surface, should be taken with a degree of skepticism. End comment.)

UNABLE TO ACT INDEPENDENTLY

¶15. (C) In terms of actual combat performance and dealing with security threats, the FARDC in Ituri has a mixed record. While the 1st Integrated Brigade has exhibited a degree of professionalism and tactical ability in fighting militias, most other units have not. Elements of the FARDC in many operations have fled the scene of battle after running out of ammunition or facing tougher-than-expected opposition. In all cases, however, the FARDC must receive substantial logistical support from MONUC peacekeepers. Without such assistance, the FARDC -- in Ituri and elsewhere in the DRC -- would be unable to plan and execute independently any size military operation. Thus, the FARDC is largely incapable of providing security on its own.

¶16. (C) In addition, the FARDC's counterparts in MONUC have said they do not trust FARDC commanders with the details of pending operations. Former MONUC-Bunia head of office Sharouh Sharif said he believes many joint MONUC-FARDC operations have been ineffective because FARDC troops leaked information to militias beforehand. MONUC commanders have now taken to deliberately withholding information from the FARDC, including the location of imminent operations. For example, when visiting FARDC officials in Bunia May 6, PolOff saw six transport trucks filled with FARDC soldiers outside the regional military headquarters. When asked where these troops were headed, General Ngoie said they were going "north," but he did not know exactly where. Later that evening, MONUC Ituri Brigade Commander General Mahboob Haider Khan said he purposely did not tell Ngoie or any other FARDC personnel where the troops were being deployed, so as to maintain operational security. General Mahboob said he simply did not trust the FARDC with such details. (Note: The soldiers seen leaving Bunia May 6 ultimately took part in Operation Ituri Ember, which seized control of several towns along Lake Albert. End note.)

COMMENT: AN URGENT NEED FOR REFORM

¶17. (C) The behavior of the FARDC in eastern DRC is not unique to that part of the country, as there are numerous reports of violations, harassment and exactions on the part of the military throughout the DRC. Neither are the difficulties the FARDC faces in terms of salaries and materiel solely a problem in the East; all FARDC units lack basic necessities like uniforms and ammunition. What makes the problems of the FARDC in the East more pressing, though, is the presence of militias and foreign armed groups which attempt to destabilize the region. Thus, the FARDC in eastern DRC by necessity should play a much more visible role in providing security than their counterparts in other sectors

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of the country. And as such, the FARDC's presence -- and the related disciplinary problems -- are much more pronounced.

All these factors point to the urgent need by the government to accelerate reform of the security sector, to institute the proposals of the European Security Commission to manage the salary system, and to complete the process of integration. Until such time as the FARDC can stand up a professional army -- adequately paid, well-equipped, well-trained, capable of independently carrying out its own missions -- the DRC will require the assistance of MONUC and others to defend itself. Moreover, without these urgent reforms, those elements of the FARDC that exploit the culture of impunity will only prolong the country's instability. End comment.

MEECE